United Nations E/2015/NGO/60

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
1 June 2015

Original: English

2015 session
21 July 2014-22 July 2015
Agenda item 5 (c)
High-level segment: annual ministerial review

Statement submitted by Make Mothers Matter, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is being issued without formal editing.

15-08611 (E) 180615

Please recycle

Statement

The Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goal's proposal for sustainable development goals defines an exhaustive and ambitious post-2015 agenda, with "poverty eradication, changing unsustainable and promoting sustainable patterns of consumption and production, and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development" being the "overarching objectives of and essential requirements for sustainable development".

While the 2000 Millennium Development Goals had a relatively limited scope with 48 indicators, the 17 sustainable development goals include 169 targets, covering most, if not all, economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development. In other words, the ultimate objective of the post-2015 agenda is the wellbeing of both humanity and our planet.

In this context, business as usual is not an option. The gross domestic product-based economic growth model where businesses' main objective is to make profit, has clearly shown its limits when it comes to ensuring people's wellbeing and the sustainability of our natural environment.

Managing the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the sustainable development goals will therefore require a profound rethink of our economic model and the indicators used by governments to elaborate policies, i.e. it is urgent to move "beyond gross domestic product".

In her ground breaking book in the field of gender equality, "If Women counted", Marilyn Waring already pointed out back in 1988 some of the shortcomings of gross domestic product as a measure of wellbeing, progress or development:

(a) Unpaid family care work is unaccounted for in the current System of National Account and economic modelling although it is crucial for human wellbeing as well as for reproducing and sustaining humanity (this devaluating of care work, which is largely performed by women results in women being over-represented among the poor).

(b) Similarly, the production of products and services does not take into account the cost of using natural resources and their depletion.

(c) On the other hand, wars, pollution or natural disasters, to which we could add over-consumption, all generate gross domestic product growth, although definitely not contributing to human and environmental wellbeing.

Short term view and narrow reasoning based on efficiency, i.e. generating most output with the least possible input (e.g. natural resources at no cost; cheap labour, especially women's labour) — need to be replaced by a new economic model that prioritizes sufficiency and long term (intergenerational) human and environmental wellbeing and sustainability.

In particular, economic models should be improved in ways that incorporate care as a capital investment rather than a cost. Generally unpaid domestic and care work, which is indispensable for the functioning of any society, needs to be made visible in order to be adequately valued.

The post-2015 agenda and its sustainable development goals provide a timely opportunity for a total rethinking on "what counts", what we value, as well as what we do not value, in order to evaluate the priorities of an economy, that also integrates social and environmental aspects.

The shortcomings of gross domestic products have resulted in dozens of new indicators being proposed over the past years, but these primarily focus on outputs, such as rates of poverty, infant mortality, educational attainment, or environmental conditions (See for example, the United Nations Human Development Index, or the European Union's 2007 "Beyond Gross Domestic Product" conference that showcased various initiatives to measure "wellbeing").

The need to shift the emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's well-being in a context of sustainability was also one of the key recommendations of the "Stiglitz Commission", which was set up by in 2008 by M. Sarkozy, then President of France. The Commission proposed some improvements on the existing gross domestic products calculations (such as the inclusion of national resources depletion, or the inclusion of unpaid work), and suggested the use of additional social, environmental and sustainability indicators to better inform policy-making.

More recently in November 2014, the Center for Partnership Studies' Caring Economy Campaign launched the Social Wealth Economic Indicators, an interesting initiative that rather focuses on inputs, i.e. what is needed for better output, and that includes:

(a) Human Capacity Indicators, measuring a nation's present human capital, and

(b) Care Investment Indicators, measuring public and private investment in building and maintaining that human capital.

Make Mothers Matter therefore calls on Member States to seize the post-2015 opportunity to:

(a) Recognize that the current metrics centered on gross domestic products are inadequate, as they neither account for environmental costs and assets (natural capital), nor for the benefits of care work and investments in Human Capital.

(b) Move away from the current obsession of "economic growth", to an economic model that prioritizes the wellbeing of people and of the planet, with efficient resource use — not over-consumption, as well as investments in the future, notably through the valuation of care.

(c) Use such work as the Stiglitz Commission's report to improve gross domestic product as an economic indicator, and develop new complementary social and environmental indicators at the global level, that among others include a care investment indicator.